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STATEMENT DELIVERED TO THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

In preparing this statement I began by asking myself what, if anything, I could contribute to these proceedings which might be of unique value. And I recollected, all too sharply, an uneasiness I felt nearly three years ago when I sat here in the visitors' gallery, and listened to the discussions on East Timor. You are all fluent in the rhetorical forms that convention requires for such discourse, and you may find my uneasiness naive when I tell you its source. It was simply this: when I tried to picture an East Timorese assisting at those discussions, one of those mountain farmers whom I had learned to know and respect, I could not think what he would have made of them. I tried to translate the debate into a Timorese language, and I could not imagine my friend finding it anything but remote; and not out of "simplicity", for these are not "simple" people, these people whose rights and future are now at issue. On the contrary, it is in contrast to the depth, complexity, and vitality of their culture that the rhetoric of debate would have seemed dry and distant.

You see, I looked for the East Timorese amidst the accusations and the counter-accusations, the allegations and the denials, the talk of communists, fascists, aggression, terrorism; I looked for them, and I could not find them. Today, I want to bring the East Timorese closer to you by articulating one of their conceptions of political reality. I am well aware of the arrogance implicit in such a project, but I am an anthropologist and my profession is in many ways an arrogant one. For I deal, or claim to deal, in the translation of culture, and my work is premised on the daring conviction that the members of different cultures can engage in communication and come to understand one another. Thus we have much in common, we anthropologists and you of the United Nations, and I thank you for granting me this opportunity to address you. For me to address you on the behalf of the East Timorese would be inappropriate, as I am not their designated spokesperson, and even the arrogance of an anthropologist has its limits. But I shall endeavor to speak in their conceptual language, and so make accessible to you their highly original and often profound outlook on the world.

Let me first describe the nature of my contact with East Timor. From October 1972 through November 1974 I conducted research for my doctoral dissertation (submitted to the Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, June, 1977) on what was then the overseas province of Portuguese Timor. For most of that time I was located in the administrative district (concelho) of Aileu, some 25 miles south of the coastal capital of Dili. The districts of Aileu, Ermera, Ainaro and Same comprise the territory of an ethnic group known as the Mambai. The Mambai number

over 80,000, speak an Austronesian language (also known as Mambai), and eke out a subsistence existence based on swidden agriculture and animal husbandry amidst the mountains and high valleys of the rugged Timorese interior.

During my stay with the Mambai I became fluent in their language and conversant with their ways of life. I also attained an adequate command of the closely related Tetun language which serves as a lingua franca throughout the province. I have travelled widely in East Timor, and I am familiar with the ethnographic literature on the various peoples of the Lesser Sunda chain to which Timor belongs. So much for credentials. I should stress, however, that my claims to direct and privileged knowledge concerning East Timor end in 1974, prior to the events of immediate concern in these discussions.

When I left East Timor the three political associations, UDT, APODETI, and FRETILIN, had formed in Dili and were beginning to extend their operations into the mountains. At that time, the mass of the population had not aligned themselves or affiliated with any one political association, but it was my impression that, of the three, FRETILIN was the most likely eventually to achieve wide popular support. This impression was founded on my general knowledge of East Timor and my contacts with FRETILIN leaders. Underlying the FRETILIN political ideology and tactics is a concept of political development as a process of interaction between the predominantly Western educated leadership and the indigenous cultures. Such interaction is more easily advocated than realized, yet the overall orientation of FRETILIN activity seemed to me most consonant with the real conditions for East Timorese nationalism.

Had the Portuguese remained on East Timor and supervised the decolonization process (as FRETILIN urgently and repeatedly requested them to do), I would have predicted a FRETILIN political victory. Furthermore, in the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the colonial government to Atauro, I believe that FRETILIN popularity must have been greatly enhanced. But this is opinion, albeit an informed one. It is a hypothesis based on my reading of the same materials available to you: the reports of the UDT coup and the swift, successful retaliation mounted by FRETILIN; the interlude when FRETILIN administered the territory as caretakers for the Portuguese government on Atauro; the politically motivated declaration of independence on November 28, 1975; the Indonesian occupation initiated on December 7, 1975 which forced FRETILIN into the mountains; and the persistent, deeply distressing reports of atrocities committed by the Indonesian armed forces against the civilian population in efforts to eliminate FRETILIN resistance.

I leave it to other speakers to analyse and interpret these events, although my own views necessarily inform this statement. But I shall return to the East

Timor that I knew, and to a moment when the future, although uncertain, still seemed to be subject to the strictures of a traditional past, a moment when the collective knowledge of a largely illiterate mountain people seemed relevant to the decisions which lay ahead.

For the East Timorese knew that there were decisions to be made. The overthrow of the Caetano government in April of 1974 sent a shock throughout the province. I was in the mountains at the time, engaged in the ceremonial reconstruction of a clan temple, and we paused in our activities to take stock of the new situation. Thus long before the first UDT and FRETILIN spokesmen made their ways into the interior, the Mambai had plunged into a concerned and continuous debate. The idioms were different in the mountains where such terms as "colonialism", "decolonization", "independence", "self determination" were not part of everyday language. The language in which Mambai discussed their future was drawn from mythology rather than from Western political and legal traditions; and their discourse, which wandered freely between political and cosmological concerns, was premised on fundamental concepts of rule, hierarchy, and order.

Mambai attention focused on the possibility of a Portuguese withdrawal. For them this was no simple matter, "this matter", as one old man put it, "of our younger brothers going away." On East Timor Portuguese colonial rule is the object of mythological representations, and in its potential termination Mambai saw a challenge to an established order of things. This order, which encompasses far more than colonial rule, is encoded in a narrative tradition referred to as the "walk of the flag" (bandeira ni lolain); the flag is the Portuguese flag, and the stages of its "walk" constitute the mythological foundations of an entire sociopolitical system.

According to the foundation myth, the Portuguese are the younger brothers of the Timorese. They too were born on the sacred mountain of origins at the center of Timor, but they vanished over the "water and sea" (éra nor taisa), taking with them the several insignia of sovereignty. Their elder brothers remained behind in the "wide and broad" (mlua nor beka) land of Timor where they established their realms and performed their appointed ritual functions. But even as the people increased and thrived under the aegis of an ancient, cosmic law, the jural order of society foundered:

Women and men do not tremble before one another	Hina nor maena ba rih ro
Do not fear one another	Ba tmau ro
They stab one another	Ro sa ro
And they slay one another	Ro tar ro.

Thus the Timorese ancestors traversed the water and the sea, and reached the land

of Portugal. There they paid homage to their younger brothers, and beseeched them to restore the flag to its original homeland, and establish a "heavy rule // weighty ban" (uku rihun // badu dmedan). This the Portuguese agreed to do. They sailed into the harbor of Dili where all the peoples of Timor, the "children of the east, west, north and south", were gathered to welcome them. This event inaugurated a new regime in which the Portuguese took their place as the defenders of jural order, while the Timorese retained their ancient ritual function of maintaining cosmological balance.

Traditions of this type are widespread in East Timor, where Portuguese rule was historically established and legitimated through its integration into traditional structures of exchange. In the early stages of the colonial occupation, the Portuguese contracted alliances with local rulers, granting military titles and insignia of office in exchange for commercial and military cooperation. During the "pacification" campaigns conducted in the early twentieth century, these alliances were extended and rigidified as the Portuguese incorporated the interior kingdoms into a system of indirect rule. This rule was sustained economically and politically by indigenous systems of tribute which the colonial administration effectively appropriated. The subsequent abolition of the tribute systems and substitution of a cash head-tax tightened Portuguese control over the territory, but at the same time confounded the traditional political orders, and, at least in some areas, severly undermined the legitimacy of Portuguese rule.

Due to a complex of historical, political, and cultural factors which I have analysed elsewhere, the Mambai preserved a strong sense of Portuguese legitimacy even after the abolition of the tribute system. To them present-day colonial rule was the trace of an ideal, mythical order; as such, its existence was more significant than were the actual abuses of the system, of which the Mambai were by no means unaware.

In 1974 this mythological model of order provided the basis for Mambai political discourse. As one might expect, the Mambai were by no means delighted with the prospect of "decolonization", or the lowering of the colonial flag, to use their idiom. However, they had swiftly and astutely perceived the inevitability of a major change in their political situation, and for this too mythology offered a model. The "walk of the flag" deals with the interlinked problems of legitimacy and succession; it tells how a new system of rule was instituted with the consent of the people. Thus in myth, the legitimacy of Portuguese rule derives from a mutual agreement made by Europeans and Timorese in the interest of society as a whole - and beyond that, in the interest of the encompassing cosmos. In Mambai

conceptions, political processes both reflect and influence cosmological processes. Perhaps some of you here today are familiar with such orientations to the world, for they have a long and venerable history, and have provided the ideological foundations of many a great and powerful state. I know no better way of communicating the gravity with which Mambai view political issues than by reference to the relation between polity and cosmos. Where political events are invested with cosmological resonances, they are not taken lightly. Furthermore, the mode of resolving political issues is deemed as important as the actual resolution.

Although the Mambai had not arrived at a preferred alternative to colonial rule by the time of my departure, they had envisioned the process of decision making, and their vision merits our attention. The Portuguese, as the Mambai perceived them, had grown old and weary, and would have to "surrender the rule" (sra ukun) to younger and fleeter heirs; similar events had occurred in the past, as when the Timorese ancestors turned over control of Timor to their young Portuguese brethren. Now as then succession would entail a collective decision. To this end Mambai called for a series of reunions and a period of careful deliberation in which the Portuguese and all the peoples of the land might gather together, express their views, and arrive at a consensual solution. Indeed, what the Mambai espoused was a process of self-determination, but informed by a deep sense of an orderly, reasoned political process as essential to cosmological well-being.

What message do these mythological models have for you of the United Nations in your deliberations concerning East Timor? First of all, they suggest an ability and a willingness to engage in collective decision-making, both of which were amply demonstrated in the months prior to the Indonesian occupation. As I read the events of those months, the peoples of East Timor drew upon their own cultural traditions and actively participated with the FRETILIN leadership in the complex process of formulating political positions. Allow me to quote one of my colleagues, Professor Shepard Forman, who spent fifteen months, from August 1973 to October 1974, with the Makassae of East Timor. In his statement to the Committee on International Relations, June 28, 1977, Professor Forman expresses his belief that "the people of East Timor are perfectly capable, provided the opportunity, of articulating decisively their political choices." I share this belief.

Professor Forman's confidence in the East Timorese grew out of his research into Makassae political history and his observation of a local act of self-determination in which over 475 Makassae household heads participated in an election resulting in the administrative autonomy of four villages. My similar evaluation of East Timorese capacities is inspired by the careful, deliberate, reflective manner in which Mambai sought to apply the mythically articulated political

principles of consensus, consent, and legitimacy.

In closing, however, I wish to make a somewhat different point concerning the Indonesian claim to sovereignty over East Timor. I would not dispute this claim on the basis of cultural grounds abstracted from their historical context. As an anthropologist I am well aware of the pervasive family resemblances between the cultures of East Timor and those contained within the Republic of Indonesia. However, contemporary East Timor is in significant respects the product of a colonial history which, for better or for worse, has cumulatively differentiated the eastern half of the island from the rest of the archipelago. The colonially imposed division of the outer arc of the Lesser Sundas between two competing spheres of interest, Dutch and Portuguese, is a fundamental historical fact which must inform the demarcation of post-colonial boundaries.

The movement toward nationalism in East Timor today represents a stage in what I refer to as the historical construction of culture. By this I mean that East Timorese cultures are, in significant respects, the product of their historical interaction with Portuguese colonial policies. As a peripheral territory which, apart from the short-lived Portuguese involvement in the sandalwood trade, was run at an economic loss, the province of Portuguese Timor was spared the massive intervention characteristic of colonial policies in areas more central to economic interests. Nonetheless, over the past three centuries Portuguese administrative and economic policies have interacted with and influenced the indigenous cultures of East Timor, generating a distinctive situation which contrasts markedly even with that on the western half of the island.

The point is that however messy it may make our maps, history has severed East Timor from the other territories now comprising the Republic of Indonesia. One can point to objective differences in demographic, ecological, economic, social and political conditions. But what is perhaps even more significant is that the people of East Timor do not perceive their own interests as coincident with those of their powerful neighbor. For the East Timorese live with a sense of history, and the myth I have introduced into these proceedings is but one expression of the way in which their cultural identities have been constituted in the course of a specific historical interaction with a particular European presence.

This brings us to the other side of the question, the cultural construction of history, or the ways in which the members of a determinate culture create their historical reality by investing the past with meaning. Such creation is a cultural activity, and the Mambai mythology of colonial rule gives us access to the processes involved. The Mambai mode of construction would probably find as little

favor with nationalists as with the Indonesians, inasmuch as it serves to legitimate a particular colonial relationship. Indeed, the widespread East Timorese respect for Portuguese rule, concretely evinced in religious attitudes toward the colonial flag, is all too often condemned as a "product of colonialism" or an instance of "colonial indoctrination". In so doing, however, one loses sight of the significance of cultural traditions, and reduces the members of these cultures to a passive role of responding to colonial stimuli.

But the Mambai did not passively submit to the European presence. Rather, they actively and creatively appropriated the political fact of colonial rule, harnessing it to their own cultural traditions, and generating or re-generating their sense of cultural identity out of a mythically articulated relationship to the Portuguese. It is this dynamic character of culture as it confronts and utilizes a new phenomenon that I have in mind when I speak of the cultural construction of history. And my point is that, today, the culturally interpreted colonial experience is a part of East Timorese reality.

This creativity of culture raises another issue. Inasmuch as mythologies are dynamic structures sensitive to changing conditions of existence, it is not impossible that if the Indonesian occupation of East Timor should become routinized, new models might someday be generated to legitimate this new system of foreign rule. For if the Indonesians of today are foreigners in East Timorese perceptions, so too were the early Portuguese colonizers. The latter had to be <u>made</u> into kinsmen, just as their flag had to be <u>made</u> sacred.

Nevertheless, given the dramatic circumstances of East Timor's "integration" into the Republic of Indonesia, ideological resolutions of the kind reached during the Portuguese regime become increasingly unlikely. Despite the superficial similarities to the old colonial situation, the conditions for the imposition of a foreign power are fundamentally different today from those which obtained in the past. The critical factor in the contemporary situation is that when the Indonesians intervened in East Timorese affairs, a national identity was in the process of formation. Precisely how advanced this process was, I cannot say, but that it had been initiated by 1974 and was intensified under the FRETILIN leadership are indisputable facts. Thus the East Timorese were decisively engaged in a new form of collective political activity which generated a heightened sense of their unity as a people. It is this activity and consciousness which irreversibly differentiates the Indonesian intervention from the earlier colonial intervention. Under Portuguese rule, individual and to some degree isolated populations were able to come to terms with a foreign presence which, moreover, did not resort to large scale military operations until relatively late in the occupation. Today, however,

the political climate is producing a polarization of the Indonesians with their supporters, and the forces of resistance coalescing around FRETILIN. In such a situation conflict is inevitable.

What I fear is that in the escalating crisis, the very survival of the indigenous cultures is seriously threatened. You will hear evidence concerning the present threat to their physical survival, and you must evaluate it for yourselves. My point, however, is that the invasion and resistance, whatever the success of one or the other, will end in the annihilation of East Timorese culture which might have encountered the Indonesians on entirely different terms.

For, the final tragedy of the situation is that, prior to the occupation, the peoples of East Timor were not hostile to their Indonesian neighbors, but rather curious and eager to know them better. Unlike other parts of Southeast Asia, in the outer arc of the Lesser Sundas there was no question of deep-seated antagonisms between the indigenous populations, no burning history of invasion and conquest. To be sure, it is an area of cultural diversity. But diversity can be the condition for genuine cultural exchange, and this might have been realized by now had the Indonesians not perceived an independent East Timor as a political threat. Today, both the Indonesians and the East Timorese are entangled in the consequences of that perception. I myself believe it to be a false one, for I am convinced that an independent East Timor and the Republic of Indonesia could co-exist in peace.

The reality of the situation in the outer arc of the Lesser Sundas is that on the eastern half of the easternmost island a people emerged from a specific and unique colonial experience. In what by now is a familiar if paradoxical pattern, the colonial period had generated boundaries between this people and their closely related neighbors, while simultaneously laying the foundations for a new national unity. Thus what draws the East Timorese together and separates them from their neighbors is the colonial past.

Today the choice is between repeating the colonial past in a different and far more destructive form, or acknowledging the rights of the East Timorese people to determine their own future free from foreign interference. I call upon both the United Nations and the Republic of Indonesia to pursue this latter course. It is my firm belief that such a course serves the mutual interests of the Indonesian and the East Timorese peoples.